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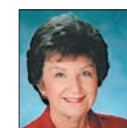
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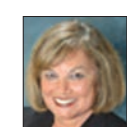
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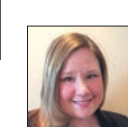
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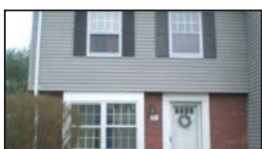
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Lisa-Bowman.com 860-983-6789



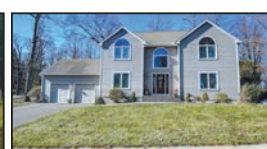
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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"I've learned over the years that we all have an internal guidance system."

- Jo Homar

See story page 6

ON THE COVER

Paul D'Attilio and Ed Chiucarello are part of a group of local walking and bicycling enthusiasts who are promoting the number of areas in town people can explore on foot and by pedal.

Photo by Lisa Brisson

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A whole new level of pride

Resident just wants the chance to serve his country

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Elijah “Eli” Calderon wants to be all that he can be, but the U.S. Army won’t let him, because of a medical condition. It started last summer when Calderon joined the Army and went through basic combat training.

“I wanted to learn new skills, travel the world,” he said. “It was fun. It was about the best time of my life, the things you were learning, the new environment. It was hard, but it was still fun.”

After graduating from boot camp, Calderon was ready for his next assignment at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, where he was going to be trained in motor transportation. It was there that a routine eye exam on the path to become a truck driver derailed his military dreams.

Calderon was diagnosed with keratoconus, a rare degenerative eye disorder that causes the normally domed shaped cornea to thin out and bulge into a cone shape. This results in distortion of vision, increased sensitivity to light and reduced visual acuity.

It was his third eye exam since enlisting.

“When he had an eye test when he first went in before basic training, they gave him glasses. This was the third test. They didn’t catch it until the third time. It’s great they caught it,” his mother Jocelyn Harvey, a

long-time Rocky Hill resident, said.

“I didn’t even know how to spell it. We looked it up. We’re still learning about it.”

“We had never heard of it before,” Calderon, 21, added. “We know it’s bad.”

In addition to dealing with the devastating diagnosis, Calderon soon found himself with another challenge. The Army discharged him in December, leaving him without work and medical benefits.

“When they told him [about the keratoconus], he lost his job, he lost the opportunity to go to school, his medical benefits, his signing bonus, everything that went along with the military just stopped. He was returned to civilian life as if it [his military service] didn’t happen,” his mother said.

“He’s always been proud of his country and wanted to serve. Once he was in, he had a whole new level of pride.”

– Jocelyn Harvey

If left untreated, keratoconus causes the eyesight to deteriorate to the point of a person becoming legally blind and needing a corneal transplant. If treated, the disease can be stopped and eyesight can be saved.

While family members could perhaps save enough money over the next year or two, they are concerned because Calderon is already experiencing symptoms of the disease. So they started a GoFundMe page to

raise money for the procedures.

Their goal is \$5,000 and that would include paying for the procedures, as well as fees, the initial consultation, prescriptions, follow up, etc. He had surgery on the first eye Feb. 28. Calderon will have the second eye done two to three months after the first. It is a lengthy recovery period for each eye.

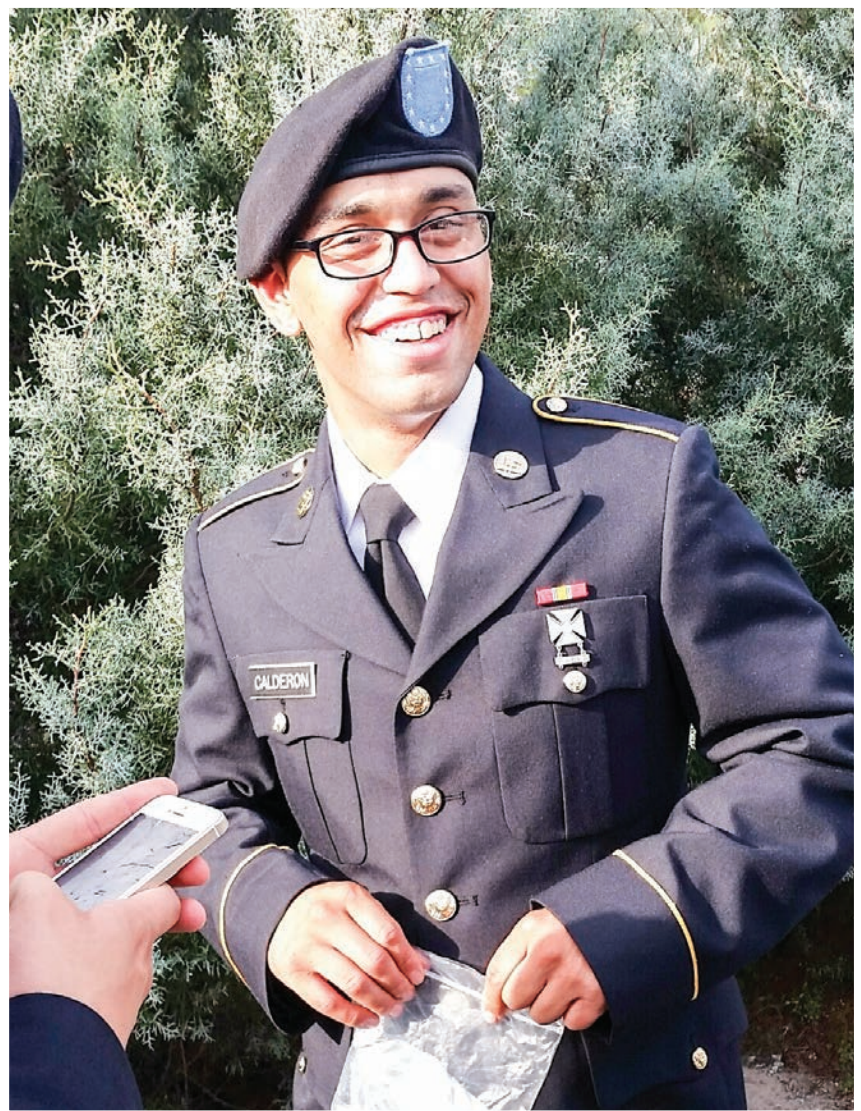
“He’ll be out of work for six months,” Harvey said.

Once the initial pain is better, they were told to expect weeks to months of healing.

“He won’t be able to drive, he won’t be able to watch TV, use the phone. The lights will affect the eye; he’ll have blurry vision. It’s a good amount of recovery time,” she said.

The recovery period will be tough on Calderon because he is used to being active and in the months between his discharge and his surgery has worked doing snow plowing, hardwood floor refinishing and work on a goat farm.

“Down time is not something I look forward to. It’s going to be a lot



Elijah “Eli” Calderon is battling an eye condition and fighting for the chance to resume his military career.

Courtesy photos

of music and sitting there doing nothing, probably a lot of pacing," he said.

"I don't know if it is because of the disease, but I don't like anything near my eyes. It's going to be pretty awful."

Once the issue with his eyes has been treated, his top goal is a return to military service.

"The recruiter is willing to go to bat for Elijah. We're going to try. When he was discharged, he had a couple of recommendations that he be retained, but the final decision was a no," Harvey said.

"He would really like to go back. Elijah kind of struggled with finding a path, but once he got in, he found where he needed to be. If he could go back, he'd go back in a heartbeat," she added.

Terry Wilson, elementary science curriculum specialist for CREC magnet schools who was Calderon's fifth grade teacher at Stevens School, believes in his ability to persevere.

"When Elijah commits to something, he sees it through. This bump in the road that temporarily interrupted his dream of serving in the Army is just that. He is not going to let this get in his way, thus his search for a solution to his eye issues," Wilson said.

The teacher kept up with the

family through the years.

"I remember him as a quiet young man who had a sweet smile. Elijah was fiercely proud of his dad, who served in the Army. He beamed from ear to ear when his dad visited his class and shared his experiences with his classmates."

Despite their current challenges, Calderon and Harvey are trying to focus on the positives, such as the GoFundMe campaign that raised more than \$3,000 in one month, including donations from Calderon's Army friends and their families.

"We're really kind of blessed

people reached out and helped. It's been a blessing and we're very grateful that people are willing to invest in Elijah. He's made an impact on people that they want to give back to him," Harvey said.

As they watch his friends ship off to places such as South Korea and Germany, they're focused on Calderon's recovery and hoping for his eventual return to the military.

"The cherry on top would be the military, but him potentially losing his sight is really scary. But also to have a child that needs this direction and the path he was on. To me, they're both equally important," Harvey said.

"As a mom, you want him to be healthy first, but you also want him to be successful and happy, but this procedure will accomplish both. I don't think either one of us appreciated how important the path of being a soldier would be," she added.

"He's always been proud of his country and wanted to serve. Once he was in, he had a whole new level of pride." **RHL**

Visit gofundme.com and search for *elijahs-eyesight* to make a donation.

Jocelyn Harvey has started a GoFundMe page to help pay for her son Elijah "Eli" Calderon's eye surgeries.



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Spirit guide

Jo Homar moves from corporate world to healing world

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Jo Homar is working in the same building where she had a corporate career for years, but her current work is worlds apart.

While she's done everything from running a kitchen in a convalescent home to working as an executive assistant, Homar now devotes her time to helping others in a different way. She was working for a reinsurance company about five years ago when she noticed something curious.

"Every time I'd be coming to work, I'd be getting vertigo. I was not feeling well. I didn't understand what was happening. It was unsettling. I

thought, 'Oh my God, I'm allergic to work,'" she recalled.

"I'd had a lot of heightened spiritual developments that were happening. I was fortunate enough to meet a craniosacral therapist, who was really intuitive, very helpful at that stage."

She came to realize that the vertigo was a sign of disharmony and that a career change was needed.

"It wasn't an easy decision. Society says we have to have a corporate job; we're supposed to plan. I've always done all those steps. I've always been a responsible individual. But there were vibrational shifts in my body, messages I was receiving," she said.

"I went and had a bunch of trainings and attunements. I was certified in Reiki and other healing

modalities so I could better understand what was happening and how to use it to heal myself."

She didn't know at first that she would turn this experience into her own company, Bountiful Blessings, which offers intuitive healing and guidance, as well as Reiki and other services.

"I was given the name of my business in meditation one night. I didn't know what to do with it. I never ran a business before. I was still working with my corporate job," she said.

"I really liked my corporate job and I liked the individuals I was working with. If I wasn't guided in a

"I've learned over the years that we all have an internal guidance system."

— Jo Homar

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Jo Homar left a corporate job to pursue a career in intuitive healing and guidance.

Courtesy photo

holistic direction, I'd still be there today. I gave my boss a year's notice," she added.

"He was thrilled and I knew I needed for myself that amount of time to actually make the transition, not only physically, but mentally."

She first rented a room in Glastonbury and would see clients after work and on weekends before leasing a space on the Silas Deane Highway in Wethersfield. This past November, she moved to the Corporate Ridge Business Complex in Rocky Hill, in the same building where she used to work.

Homar has had otherworldly connections since she was young.

"I had a lot of déjà vu experiences as a child growing up, meaning at an early age I'd be doing something and as I was doing it, [I'd feel] I had already done it before. I'd have conversations with individuals and knew exactly what they would say and what I would respond with before it would happen," she said.

"I didn't understand what was happening. I didn't have anyone to

talk to about it. It was not the norm for the family," added Homar, who grew up in a large family in Wallingford.

"I suppressed it and pushed it down and went about my childhood. Things started really changing when my mom was diagnosed with cancer in 2000. While she was in hospice, she would be verbalizing a lot of future events while in that in-between state of the physical world to the spiritual world.

"It really piqued my interest and reactivated a lot of things that I'd suppressed from my childhood," she said.

Homar struggled to deal with her mother's death. One day, one of her sisters was approached by a stranger at a bus stop.

"He said, 'I don't mean to upset you or scare you, but your mom wants to talk to your sister.' I've always believed in the psychic and spiritual realm, but she wasn't really into it. My sister was, 'Which one does she want to talk to?'"

"He said, 'She wants to talk to the one who just built the big yellow house,'" Homar recalled, which

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described her home in Wethersfield.

"That was my first time meeting someone who had a gift like that," she added. "It really snowballed from there."

She has learned to use her gifts to help others.

"My sessions are always divinely guided. I'm always guided by spirit for each individual each time they come. They just book the time, whether it's healing or a reading or guidance or messages. A lot of times, it's both healing and guidance. Messages aren't just messages from spirit. There's really a whole healing aspect to it," she said.

"That's why I allow myself to be guided and focused on the individual each time they come. What you need when you come today might not be what you need the next time you come. It's always changing, it's always different," she added.

"The environment I create and the environment the spirit creates is a very caring and nurturing environment. The way the spirit works for me is it's always positive information that comes in. It's always a safe environment," Homar said.

"You never hear anything you're not ready to receive. I keep it positive. It's important that you come into a safe and professional environment."

Homar explained that there are four ways of perceiving energies, such as clairvoyance, which is clear seeing, and clear cognizance, which is simply knowing.

"I have ability to do all four. I don't get to choose; it's up to them. Most of the time the guides come in and I see them and they talk to me. It's just like we're having a conversation. I receive the conversation and I can relay it to the client," she said.

"My connection is a pure, straight connection to source, and it's visual and hearing, for the most part. It's like a three-way conversation."

Homar doesn't just work with people, she's also able to help animals.

"Pet communication was very surprising to me the first time it happened," she said.

"I've found throughout the years if energy, dead or alive, has a message to give, it will come through, whether it's an animal or a human, whether they speak English. It's like a grandmother who spoke only Italian and they have to speak to me in English. We're all energy beings, whether we're human or animal. I'm connecting with their energy, their soul, their being."

Deb Smith of Wethersfield sought Homar's services for both

herself and her dog Skippy.

"I was feeling very unfocused, a little anxious and kind of blue. Also, I wanted to ask about my dog, who was acting very aggressive toward a workman at my house and has never been aggressive like that before. Jo explained the dog was worried about me, but subsequently calmed down," Smith said.

"Jo did a healing session which greatly relieved my anxiety, made me feel relaxed and lifted my spirits. Skippy wasn't there. It was just me, but she communicated with him anyway. [It's] hard to believe, I know, but she's the real deal."

Homar said it's not unusual to work with a client who is not in the room.

"It's just reading energy. I have a lot of clients in California. I don't see them unless it's through Facetime or Skype," she said.

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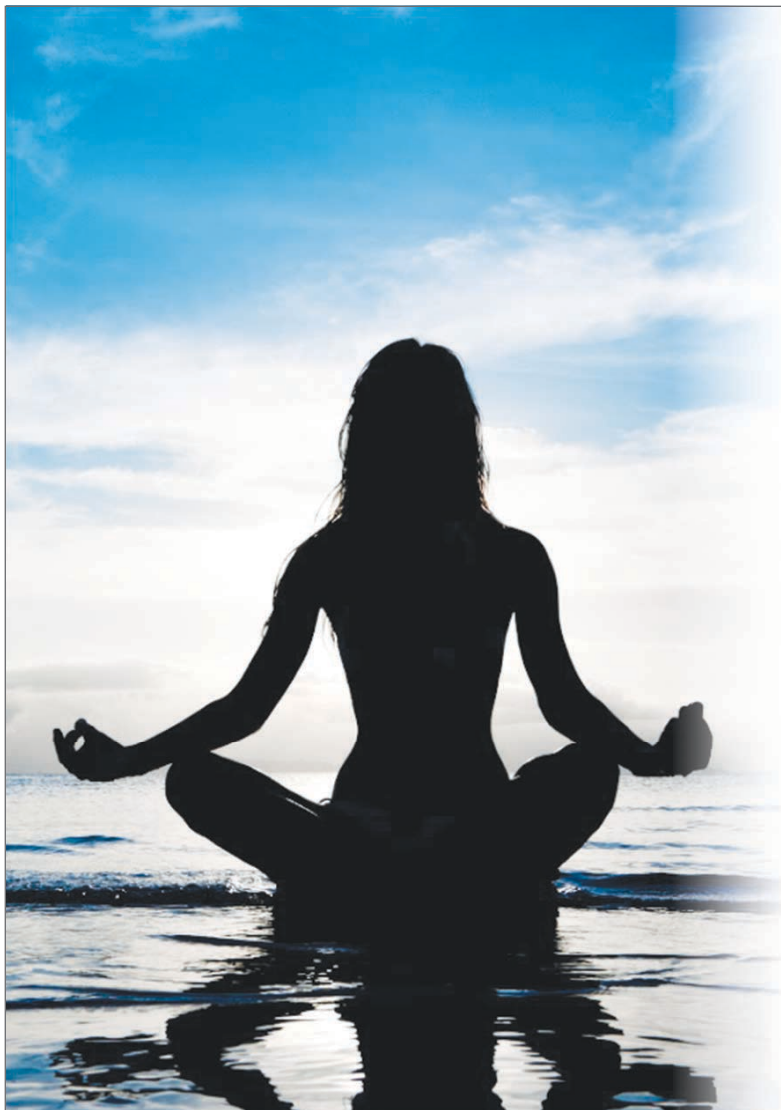
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She also works and teaches in Arizona and she and her husband, Howard, recently bought land there.

"There are a lot of like-minded individuals in that area. They're a lot more advanced or willing to learn or to engage in this type of healing work," she said.

Many of her clients make appointments because a loved one has died or because they have a medical situation and are looking for answers.

Homar doesn't ask for any history when a first-time client comes in. On one such encounter, the spirit told her to check for Lyme disease.

Although the client had already been checked for the illness and had been experiencing symptoms for five years, she had a different test and it came back positive for Lyme.

"She left me a voicemail; she was crying, she was so happy, not that she was diagnosed with Lyme disease, but that she had the answer and able to get on the correct course of treatment," said Homar.

She does not diagnose, but refers clients to physicians for testing. Another client came in for a regular session and Homar's guides told her that her thyroid needed to be checked.

"She's a singer. Obviously, her voice is very important to her. I got an email from her. They found thyroid cancer. They caught it soon enough to save her career, to save her voice. If something important comes up, I have an obligation to relay it," Homar said.

While she has special gifts, she said all people have abilities that perhaps they are not using.

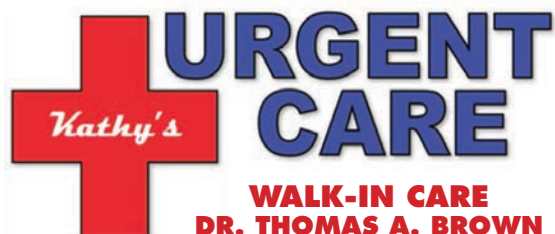
"I've learned over the years that we all have an internal guidance system; we're all born with an internal guidance system. Some choose to be aware of it and some choose to ignore it. We all need help sometimes, whether it's guidance or healing," she said.

She encourages her clients to tune in.

"Pay attention to your surroundings. Our spirit wants us to be happy and healthy. As humans, we put blinders on and don't pay attention fully to those messages that come through. I only know what the spirit tells me.

"When the client comes in, I take my ego out of it. I'm not looking at the individual and analyzing the individual. The truth is going to come through and I don't let my ego interfere with that." **RHL**

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A \$75 million budget is proposed

Unknown factors create a fiscal challenge for the Town Council

by Mark Jahne
 Editor

The mystery of what the town will receive in state aid is playing a significant role as the Town Council works to develop and approve a 2017-18 municipal budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

Interim Town Manager John Mehr has proposed \$75.1 million as a starting point. That number is \$2.3 million more than the current budget and reflects a 3.19 percent increase.

Revenues to support that budget will come from the property tax

(89 percent), state aid (9 percent) and other revenues such as fees and building permits (2 percent).

The end result is an increase in the mill rate to 32, up one from last year. The mill rate is used to compute how much homeowners, businesses and motor vehicle owners pay in local taxes.

Mehr said that based upon the average local home assessed at \$200,000 this means a tax increase of \$204 next year, or approximately \$17 more a month.

"The town is heavily reliant on property taxes," he said.

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More than half of the municipal budget – nearly \$41 million – is the Board of Education's portion. That represents a proposed 3.96 percent increase in school spending. Salaries and benefits make up 83 percent of the district's budget.

The grand list of taxable property, updated every October, showed a 1.38 percent increase. The municipal budget consists of four categories: town government operations, public education, capital improvements and debt service.

The state government's more than \$1.5 billion deficit has made the usual guesswork involving the local

budget much more difficult. It's already a challenge because municipalities, by charter, must adopt their budgets weeks before the legislature does the same.

Rocky Hill's charter requires budget adoption no later than May 15. If the council is unable to agree on a spending and revenue plan by then, the manager's proposed budget automatically takes effect.

Even in the best of years, cities and towns have to guess how much state revenue they will receive for public education and other needs. They pass a budget hoping that their numbers are relatively close to what

they will actually get.

This year, that guesswork is more extensive.

The numbers the council adopts could be right on the money or off by a huge amount. The latter scenario is something nobody wants to think about right now.

The governor's proposed budget shows decreases in both state aid and school funding for Rocky Hill. The positive side of his proposal is more municipal revenue sharing and a new special education grant, though none of the numbers are firm due to ongoing budget debate in the state legislature.

Budget drivers for fiscal 2018 are the usual suspects: salaries and benefits, insurance, debt service, capital improvements and public education. School spending represents more than half of the budget in Rocky Hill and most other Connecticut communities.

To help keep the tax increase down, Mehr omitted two significant expenditures from the budget he presented to councilors the evening of April 6.

The first is a \$473,000 special tax the Metropolitan District wants the town to pay in the event that the city of Hartford, which is in financial

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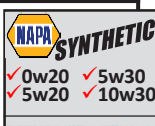
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crisis, defaults on its payment for sewer services. MDC officials are asking the other seven member towns, including Rocky Hill, to put money aside for Hartford's share of the bill, but some are balking at doing so.

Omitted item number two is the proposed transfer of the teachers' pension plan from the state budget to the 169 cities and towns. This pension has always been funded by the state.

"If this goes through, Rocky Hill would have to pay over \$2 million," Mehr said.

"We're looking to add 3.5 positions in this budget," he added.

The total cost of that is \$173,000. He told the council one of those positions is a police/fire dispatcher who was hired in December, halfway through the current fiscal year.

State law now requires that more than one emergency dispatcher be on duty at all times, Mehr said, so that requires the hiring of an additional person. He also wants to add a custodial position to clean the public library and the newly installed

restrooms at Ferry Park.

His proposal includes \$2.9 million for debt service. Some of the major outstanding debt items are \$17 million for the high school renovation project, \$6.4 million for public safety, \$3.5 million for roads and \$2 million for design work on the new intermediate school that will be built on the site of the former Moser School.

"The town is heavily reliant on property taxes."

– Interim Town Manager John Mehr

Construction work on the high school project is expected to be completed in time for the opening of the 2017-2018 academic year in September.

There is no money in the budget for replacement of the aging Elm Ridge Park swimming pool. Salaries, health insurance premiums and the cost of MDC services are all areas of

increase. Mehr proposes a lower pension contribution and less money allocated for workers' compensation due to fewer claims being filed.

He is hopeful that the projected health care costs will come down prior to budget adoption as they have done in the past.

The Board of Education is asking for \$1.26 million in capital

improvement funds. This includes ongoing modular classroom leases and phase two of installing air conditioning at Griswold Middle School. Two additional modular units need to be added to alleviate overcrowding at Stevens School.

Mehr also announced a plan to reduce the number of cars assigned to town employees from 13 to seven.

Some of them are as much as 15 years old and have outlived their useful lives. He would also like to establish an official vehicle replacement policy.

Mayor Claudia Baio was asked for her initial reaction to Mehr's proposal.

"We all knew this was going to be a difficult budget cycle. It's a frustration having to pass our budget before the state," she said.

The mayor is worried that the legislature and governor will dump the fiscal liability for the teachers' pension fund in the town's lap and expressed her fervent hope that this will not happen. The council has relayed that concern to the town's legislative delegation.

The Town Council will hold a meeting with the school board at 7 p.m. May 4 at town hall to conduct a final review of the school portion of the overall budget. Anyone wishing to view the budget document may do so on the town's website rockyhillct.gov or read a printed copy found in the reference department at the Cora J. Belden Library. **RHL**



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Students of the month

Pair of RHHS seniors receive special recognition

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Rocky Hill High School Principal Mario Almeida takes on the task each year of selecting two grade 12 students who exhibit exemplary leadership skills for the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education Student Leadership Award. This year's winners, Isabella Colasacco and Bailey O'Connell, were described by Almeida as "two very special students."

"They're really two of the nicest kids and they've both overcome so much stuff," the principal said.

The award recognizes students who demonstrate a willingness to take on challenges, capability to make difficult decisions, concern for others, diplomacy and the ability to honor a commitment, among other criteria. According to Almeida, both Isabella and Bailey exceed expectations in these areas.

"They have all of these characteristics and

"These are two great, great kids, and very deserving."

– Mario Almeida

they don't do it looking for praise," he said.

The pair found out they were being recognized by a call from Almeida.

"I just remember the call and I was thinking, what did I do?" Isabella said with a laugh. "I didn't think I was very noticeable, but I guess not."

Bailey was excited when he learned of the honor.

"I knew it was a highly credible award and I was very thankful to receive it," he said.

The two seniors are active in a wide variety of clubs and classes. Music has rapidly become an important part of Isabella's day. She plays percussion in the jazz band and pep band, sings in the chorus and serves as the drum major for the award-winning Royal Blues Marching Band.

"I just started my freshman year," she said. "I'd never played anything and my brother is the one who got me into it."

Since then, she has been inspired and encouraged by her band teacher, James Shuman, to continue.

"Mr. Shuman's such a great teacher," she said. "He helps us with a lot of things every day, not just the band."

As the drum major, Isabella is a leader on the field, conducting the band in all of its performances.

"It's a big leadership role that I had to audition for," she said.

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Her extensive work in the music department led to Isabella being accepted into the Tri-M National Music Honor Society. She reflected that only four years ago, she didn't know how to play any instruments, and now music is a large part of her education.

"Once you start being a music student you kind of get sucked into all of it," she said with a laugh.

Along with her music courses, her favorite subject to study is English.

"We just read 'The Stranger' by Albert Camus and it was really great," she said.

Isabella hopes to major in elementary education and minor in English when she attends Keene State College in the fall where her brother, John-Paul, is already a student. Outside of the classroom, she is an athlete, having run on the outdoor track team every year since middle school.

"I started as a sprinter but then I went into distance," she said. "This year I'm doing 800s and 400s."

The team provides a fun outlet to stay active.

"It just kind of makes you feel better," she said. "It's a fun team to be on."

Isabella also serves as the co-president of the French Club that began last year.

"I've been taking French class since the seventh grade," she said. "In French Club you get more of the cultural aspect of it."

She recently helped to organize a French Club field trip to New York City to see a production of the "Phantom of the Opera." She also had another recent culture shock when she volunteered to travel to New Orleans with the school's annual Habitat for Humanity trip.

"It puts things into perspective," she said. "You have to realize that not everyone has it as good as you,

Isabella Colasacco, left, 17, and Bailey O'Connell, 18, were selected as the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education Student Leadership Award recipients from Rocky Hill High School.



Photo by Allie Rivera

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and sometimes you really need to see that.”

Isabella worked a variety of jobs including digging foundations for future homes.

Giving back is an important part of this teenager's life. When possible, she volunteers at local soup kitchens throughout the Hartford area, and she also tries to be present for those around her at school who may simply need a friend.

“I feel like everyone needs someone,” she said. “I don't want people to feel like they're alone. I want people to know they have someone to talk to.”

“She's just a sweetheart,” Almeida said. “Her character, her willingness to work hard and give back, it's just beyond.”

Giving back is also an important part of life for Bailey. He is an active member of the school's Best Buddies program, which pairs students with special needs with their typical peers for a variety of social interaction.

“I like to help people,” he said. “I like to be their friend and I think it's just a small thing that I can do for them.”

His favorite subject is English where he and his classmates recently read such novels as “Frankenstein” by Mary Shelley, “The Stranger” by Albert Camus and “Candide” by

Voltaire, and he enjoys the writing aspect of the class as well.

“The skills you develop in writing really help you so much in life,” he said.

Outside of the classroom, Bailey serves as the captain of the school's baseball team, chosen by his coach and teammates. He earned a spot on the varsity team his sophomore year and the sport has always been a part of his life.

“I've been playing since T-ball,” he said.

During his junior year, Bailey was recognized with the Outstanding Hitter Award. A well-rounded athlete who formerly played football, he said his heart belongs on the diamond.

“Baseball is the game I love.”

As captain, it is his responsibility to set an example for the others, both on and off the field. Along with playing for the school, Bailey spent three years playing for the Rocky Hill Parks and Recreation league, with his team making it to the final four.

He also volunteered with the Rocky Hill Youth Football league, helping to train seventh and eighth grade players.

“They ended up winning the championship,” Bailey said. “We didn't lose a game all year.”

These volunteer opportunities are important to Bailey, who said that he likes to try to find ways to give back to the community. In addition to his volunteer work with youth football, he also volunteers at his church by helping to supply a

monthly breakfast for the members.

He plans to attend Nichols College in the fall to study accounting.

“I've always liked working with money and it's in demand,” he said of his career aspirations. “I think it's a good career to pursue.”

Family is extremely important to Bailey, the middle child of five along with his older sister Ashley, 24, brother Jameson, 20, who is in the U.S. Army, and sisters Gracie, 11, and Sofia, 10, who are students at West Hill School.

The family also has a silky terrier named Coach. It is the support of his parents that means the most to him.

“My parents have always been there to push me to strive for excellence,” he said. “They've supported me through everything.”

According to Almeida, Bailey is deserving of any recognition he may receive.

“Bailey is just one of my favorites,” he said. “He's a good kid and so hard working.”

Almeida added that he is proud to have students such as Bailey and Isabella represent Rocky Hill High School.

“These are two great, great kids, and very deserving,” he said. **RHL**



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LIFE

in the classroom

Future chefs whip up tasty and educational dishes

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

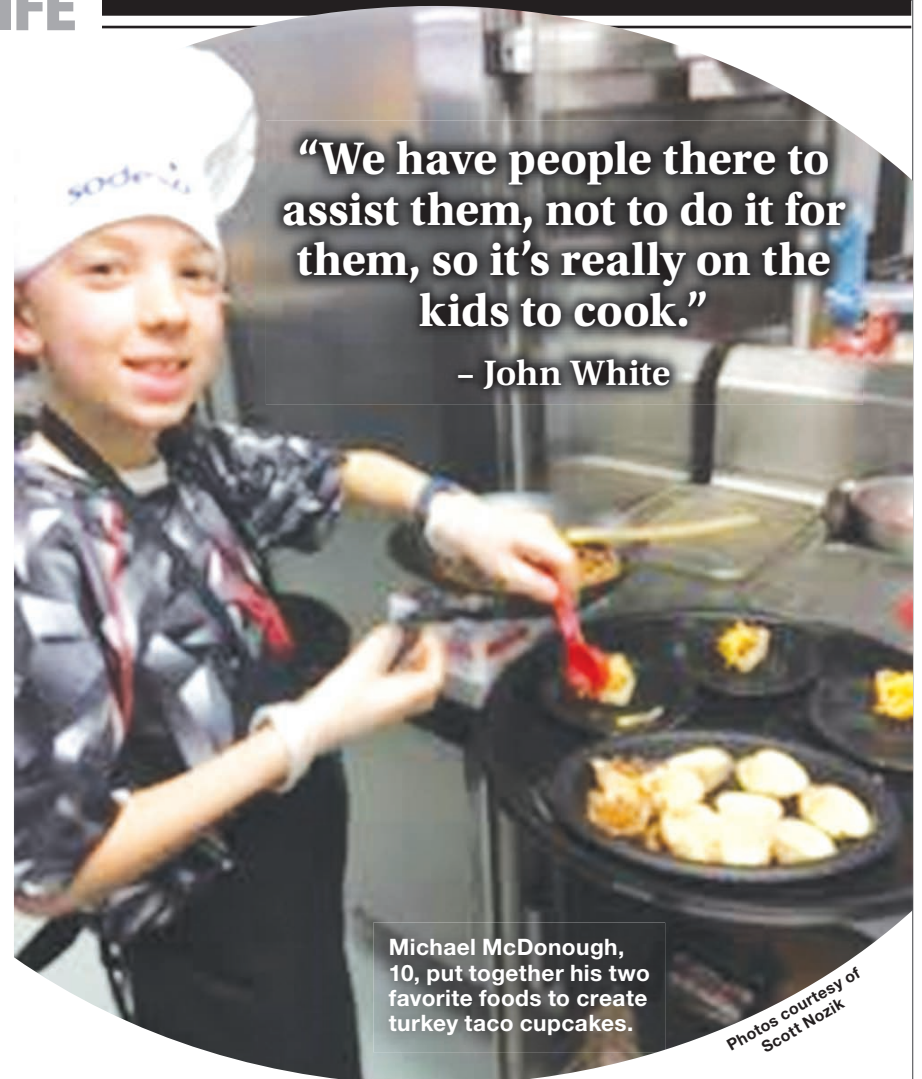
Five chefs took to the kitchen at Rocky Hill High School to prepare different culinary masterpieces. None of them were professionals. In fact, none of them has finished the fifth grade.

The young chefs, all students at West Hill School, were part of the annual Future Chefs competition hosted March 20 by the school's food

services company, Sodexo.

"We've been doing this for the past five to six years. Each year we alternate between West Hill and Stevens," Sodexo General Manager John White said.

Before the competition at the high school, White and his team took submissions from fourth and fifth grade students. This year they received around 25 entries.



"We have people there to assist them, not to do it for them, so it's really on the kids to cook."

– John White

Michael McDonough, 10, put together his two favorite foods to create turkey taco cupcakes.

Photos courtesy of Scott Nozik

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Kids LIFE

"We then have a selection committee of anonymous members of the school who look at them," White said. "They're looking for things like kid friendliness, ease of preparation, and they can get bonus points for using certain ingredients if they choose to."

In order to promote healthier eating, submissions were given extra points if they included ingredients such as whole grains, brown rice or low-fat cheese, or didn't include nuts.

"It teaches them about healthy food and it gets them involved in culinary practices," White said.

From those 25 submissions, the anonymous team chose five diverse recipes for those students to cook on site at the competition.

"We supply all of the ingredients for them," White said. "We have people there to assist them, not to do it for them, so it's really on the kids to cook."

Getting to that level took a great deal of preparation. While some students already had recipes in mind that they learned from their parents, others used the Internet or their own culinary backgrounds to come up with recipes.

"My dad was making it and I just added a couple tweaks to it, like some celery and carrots," 11-year-old Leah Potter said of her stuffed pepper recipe.

Michael McDonough said coming up with his dish was as simple as looking at what he already liked.

"I love tacos and I love cupcakes, so I decided to combine them both and make turkey taco cupcakes," the 10-year-old said. "The fun part for me was trying out different ways to make it."

In addition to those two dishes, the top five recipes also included quiche cupcakes, pasta and turkey meatballs and cauliflower macaroni and cheese.

The students who submitted those recipes came from a wide range of cooking experience,



The top five contestants in the Future Chefs competition were, from left, winner Candice Edmunds, Michael McDonough, Akshada Dhoke, Leah Potter and Teresa Lee.

including some who used the competition as a chance to acquaint themselves with the kitchen in a new way.

"I haven't cooked before, but I've baked," said Teresa Lee, 10, who made the cauliflower macaroni and cheese. "I bake every Saturday, so my parents said I should enter."

The students said the competition taught them valuable lessons.

"I learned that you have to make sure to use the right amount of ingredients," quiche cupcakes creator Akshada Dhoke, 9, said. "The fun part about it all was that I got to see everyone else's recipes."

On the day of the competition, the five chefs met at the high school to prepare and present their individual dishes for a panel of judges from the district, including Darlene Listro, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

"The hardest part to me was talking to the judges," Candice Edmunds, 10, said.

Despite her nerves Candice, who created pasta and turkey meatballs, was declared the winner. Her recipe was submitted for the competition at the regional level and, should her dish be selected, she would create a video submission.

Nine-year-old Akshada Dhoke had some assistance in the kitchen as she made her quiche cupcakes.



Winning the grand prize was not the only goal. Each of the top five chefs said they gained a new appreciation for cooking and hoped to continue in the future.

"My mom took some of the other recipes from the cook-off and we're trying them at home," Candice said. "We started coming up with new recipes of our own now."

The students also said they learned more about healthy eating.

"If you eat junk food your whole life, then when you grow up it's going to be a big difference," Leah said. "It's important to know about it."

Sodexo staff and the school administration said those life lessons were the most valuable piece they hoped students would understand.

"It's teaching them good habits," White said. "We want them to learn the correct principles for maintaining a healthy lifestyle and show you can have a lot of fun doing it." **RHL**



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Honoring artists

Seven students from Rocky Hill High School and three from Griswold Middle School received recognition from the Connecticut Regional Scholastic Art Awards, a professionally juried event. This year there were close to 3,000 submissions. Submissions were hung in the Slipe Gallery at the Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford. Gold Key winners go on to the national competition and work selected for this show will be displayed in May in New York City, with an awards ceremony at Carnegie Hall.

GMS winners were: Lillian Aube, "Red Bird," sculpture, Silver Key; Olivia Weeks, "Blue Threads Basket

Bowl," sculpture, Silver Key and Kelsey Aberbach, "Basket Bowl," sculpture, honorable mention.

RHHS winners were: Nate Gariepy, "Steven," photography, Silver Key; Katherine Stockman, "Molly," photography, Silver Key; Stephen Gerick, "Exploration in Pattern," art portfolio, Silver Key; Alana Rylec, "Guns for Hands," drawing and illustration, Silver Key; Samantha Brady, "Mocha Diffusion," ceramics and glass, Silver Key; Samantha Brady, "Marbelized Clay," ceramics and glass, Silver Key; Maya Eisenhaur, "The Fand (Foot and Hand), sculpture, Silver Key; Samantha Brady, "Saggar Fire," ceramics and glass, honorable mention. **RHL**



Above: "Marbelized Clay," Samantha Brady, Rocky Hill High School; right: "Red Bird," Lillian Aube, Griswold Middle School





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Where learning is fun

Bringing children to local museums can be great for everybody

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor



One of the favorite spots of children visiting the Noah Webster House & West Hartford Historical Society is the Discovery Space.

Courtesy photos

Kate Ebner, director of educational programs at the Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, looked out her office window to see a couple of children outside having a blast rolling down the hill. It caused her to exclaim how much she loves her job.

For many museum curators, at one time the thought of having young, active, sticky fingered children amongst their collection was enough to cause much agitation. After all, children like to touch things, they like to talk, and they like to run – a mix that could have dreadful consequences for the antiques or priceless pieces on display.

While there certainly must be care and watchful eyes, much has changed for children visiting museums and several local museums are encouraging children to enjoy what they have to offer. Often they are allowed to touch things, dig in the dirt and run around, too.

“Nothing makes me happier than seeing young folks enjoy the museum and property,” Ebner said.



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Kids LIFE

She encourages parents to bring their children to the museum at any age, saying it is a great opportunity for them and helps them also learn museum etiquette.

"I really do believe the sooner the better," she said, noting it's a misconception that you shouldn't bring young children to a historical house. "They will learn, they will learn why eyes only and learn about the collection."

This summer the Hill-Stead will be partnering with the nearby Stanley-Whitman House for the first time. During the last week of their summer workshop, participants spend their morning at the Hill-Stead and the afternoon at the Stanley-Whitman House on High Street in Farmington.

This Colonial style home, built in 1720, is also fun for all ages.

"We are a pretty kid-friendly location," said Joan Zeisner, educational director at the Stanley-Whitman House, adding that the museum will purposely push furniture out of the way to ensure chil-

dren who visit can explore as much of the home as they would like.

Young guests enjoy working in the garden and as they tour the house, learning about what life was like 300 years ago. Another popular part of visits are the characters guests may meet.

She has seen children have a great time interacting with the museum's volunteers who dress up in period garb.

"They can be pretty convincing," Zeisner said of the characters.

Children can ask them questions and the characters show them how people cooked over a hearth or played Colonial games.

In West Hartford, children can also have a Colonial experience when they visit the Noah Webster House and West Hartford Historical Society.

As with other museums the interactive activities are a big hit. Here children can visit the Discovery Center consisting of three rooms that were part of the original house, which is now a hands-on area for

children. Guests can put on costumes depicting the Colonial era, visit the pantry that is filled with imitation foods that colonial people would have eaten and there is a representation of the farm from what it looked like when Noah Webster lived there. Children can also get their hands dirty in the archeological dig area, where they can find replicas of items that were found on the site during an authentic dig.

Children also enjoy the street map that depicts the town roads from the 18th century and comparing it to the modern street map on display.

Whether a student comes to the museum as part of a school program or with their family, Sweeney said they would get a taste of the past.

"It's history and we are big history buffs here," she said.

In Wethersfield the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum on Main Street in Old Wethersfield often hosts school groups and has the occasionally young history

buff stop in, too.

Tours of the three colonial-era homes are mostly geared for adults, but guides are quick to share details of 18th century life that will appeal to children.

Like at other historical homes bathroom humor gets a rise out of children and the privy's are a big draw for younger visitors.

"They are fascinated by that," Cynthia Riccio, education director, said.

"I think more than anything we are flexible," Riccio said, adding that activities often reserved for school groups can be shared with families who bring their young children to the museum too. For instance there are several colonial games that children have fun learning how to play.

Riccio said the museum is most appropriate for children in the fifth grade age range, although third graders enjoy it as well.

"Their phones are not out, they are not texting, they are not on social media. They are engaged, which is good." **RHL**

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News roundup

Not just for children

Olga Rodriguez and her grandchildren, Ashley Moore and Michael Mitchell, enjoy the drop-in Coloring For Adults program offered Wednesday evenings from 6:15-7 p.m. at the Cora J. Belden Library. Any adult can stop by and color with pencils and coloring books in the tables located upstairs. Rodriguez shows her grandchildren, Ashley Moore and Michael Mitchell, what she has been working on.

Get out and walk

The Central Connecticut Health District is once again sponsoring a six-week walking competition in the four towns that it serves. It kicks off April 30 and will conclude on June 10.

This free team competition is designed to bring awareness to the importance of healthy and active lifestyles for people of all ages. Register online at walkingworks.com or on its mobile app. CCHD serves Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield.

Shred those documents

The town government will host a paper-shredding day for Rocky Hill residents only from 9 a.m. to noon June 17 at Stevens School, 322 Orchard St. This event is limited to paper.

Each resident may bring two or three copy paper-sized boxes or brown paper bags full of papers to shred. A driver's license will be required to participate and nobody under the age of 18 will be allowed



Film rights to book acquired

to assist with dumping the paper into collection bins.

Film rights to book acquired

A production company recently purchased the film rights to the book "Barnstorming America" by Rocky Hill resident John Molina. It chronicles the early days of women's professional basketball in the United States.

Molina attended the NCAA women's national basketball final four in Dallas, Texas, and did a book signing. He was joined by players from seven of those legendary teams.

Classic car show returns

Rocky Hill Parks and Recreation is teaming up with the Over the Hill

Gang Eastern Chapter to showcase beautiful old cars from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 7 at Elm Ridge Park. Food and music will be available and cars will be eligible for dash plaques and trophies.

Proceeds will benefit the Rocky Hill Human Services Energy Assistance Program, Connecticut Association of Foster & Adoptive Parents and the Rocky Hill Summer Concert Series. For further information call 860-258-2772 or log on to rockyhillct.gov/parkrec or overthehillgangcarclub.com.

Unique flag is preserved

The Rocky Hill Historical Society recently came into possession of an unusual old American flag. The large

flag bears 34 stars set in a star pattern and is believed to date from the Civil War.

It was stored with the town Parks and Recreation Department for many years. Town Historian Robert Herron said his research thus far indicates this type of flag is rare. It measures 30 feet by 20 feet and is in tattered condition.

A.G. Parker, the local postmaster in 1862, purchased the flag for \$70. A newspaper report from 1917 indicates that it flew from a pole in front of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church for 10 years after the end of the war until the 100-foot pole was struck by lightning and destroyed. **RHL**



Not just for children

Photo by Lisa Brisson



Unique flag is preserved

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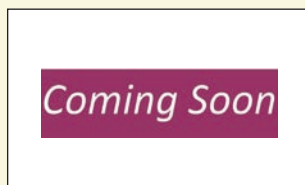
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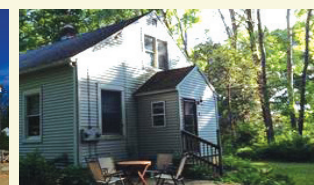
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From the Mayor's Desk

Spring is here and life is busy

by Claudia Baio

This month was abuzz with activity as spring springs. Despite a chilly, windy day, the Cora J. Belden Library had a successful 5K run/walk/kids run with a strong turnout. Hats off to the library staff and volunteers for a well-organized and successful event.

Later that same day Bob Herron, our town historian, held his book signing for his book on World War I co-sponsored by the Rocky Hill Historical Society and the library at the historical society. Councilor John Emmanuel, Interim Town Manager John Mehr and I were among those at the book signing event for Bob.

It was a fascinating presentation, enhanced by the fact that family members of some of the Rocky Hill folks involved in the war and featured in the book were in attendance. Copies are available at the historical society. We bought ours.

Moving on to some other exciting news, congratulations to the faculty and staff of West Hill School on being designated a school of distinction for highest growth of high needs students. State Rep. Tony Guerrera and I presented proclamations to recognize this honor.

I also had the pleasure of participating in several fun activities with our schools, with more on the horizon.

The high school held its cabaret night to showcase the musical talent of so many of our students. Bravo to Choral Director Kim Quinn and her team, as well as all the students, on a lovely evening of musical performances.

While at West Hill, I assisted with distribution of the free books earned by the lucky students whose names were pulled from the weekly drawing of those who had earned "yes" tickets throughout the week. "Yes tickets" are earned by the students for various acts of positive behavior throughout the week, with the drawing held on Friday.

The lucky students then get to select a free book. This brought back memories. It is so fun to watch the excitement of the good boys and girls who were lucky enough to win and get to select a new book of their choice for free.

I also accompanied Principal Scott Nozik to visit the students at Nature's Classroom. What a wonderful experience for our kids. This coming month I am looking forward to visiting Stevens School for curriculum night, book fair, and K-2 art



Principal Scott Nozik and Mayor Claudia Baio hand out books at West Hill School as part of the celebration of it being named a school of distinction.

show, spring concert and grades 3-5 art show.

Many came out to listen and share views with Dr. Manoj Pardasani, who is facilitating our senior survey. Dr. Pardasani held focus groups, provided a presentation and was available to answer any questions about his thoughts and survey.

He will be reviewing our surveys as well. We were very encouraged by the number of completed surveys received. Thank you to all who responded. Further updates to come.

More great news for our town – we recognized the Great Meadows Conservation Trust at a Town Council meeting with a proclamation. The Great Meadows was designated an important bird area by the National Audubon Society.

Rocky Hill resident and GMCT member Chris Duff, as the incoming president, accepted the recognition along with his predecessor Tom Kehoe at the recent trust annual meeting and also accepted the recognition at the town meeting. Chris is also a member of our Inland Wetlands Commission.

The Town Council voted to proceed with hav-

ing Eversource move forward with the change over of our streetlights to LED lights. This will be done at no cost to the town and with no need for the town to purchase lights or poles or to pay for maintenance contracts.

Consideration is taken by Eversource in using the preferred LED lights. We were also able to overcome the last obstacle to proceeding with our solar farm. We are now ready to proceed and will also begin receiving our payments for rent from Solar City.

These are all important as the town continues through the challenge of this particularly difficult budget season. Following the public hearing and presentation of the interim town manager's budget, we have been proceeding with our budget workshops and reviews and are approaching conclusion. Our budget must be adopted by the third Monday of May.

As you approach the Town Center at dusk, notice the blue lights and banners for Light It Up Blue for Autism Awareness. State Sen. Paul Doyle,

state Rep. Tony Guerrero and I participated in the ceremony, beautifully organized by parent volunteer and town resident Annie Cerpa. The lights and banners were displayed for the month for that important recognition.

As always, I welcome your contact, whether by calls, writing or in person. Office hours are held every Friday. Call 860-258-2740, email cbaio@rockyhillct.gov or see Facebook/Baio for Rocky Hill. I hope to see you all at our annual Memorial Day Parade. **RHL**

The Town Council honored the Great Meadows Conservation Trust and the recent designation of the meadows as an important bird area.



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- * Kids Fun Run: \$5

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Slice of LIFE

photos by Lisa Brisson



A few hundred hardy souls braved the brisk spring wind, including some snowflakes, to show their support for the Cora J. Belden Library, all while getting a good run and walk in during the Second Annual Lace Up for the Library 5K Run/Walk and Kids Fun Run. Held at Griswold Middle School, Sarah Girach, 8, was the first Kids Fun Run racer across the finish line. Brett Stoeffler of Tolland was the first 5K runner in with a time of 17:32.5. Ethan Arcata of Rocky Hill reached the finish line second with his time of 18:26.9, and 11-year-old Elise Kennedy of Middletown was the first female with a time of 20:52.5.



Off and running

1. Spencer Degnan, 5, and his 7-year-old brother Avery enjoyed doughnuts following the race. **2.** Alexandra Kumnick, 2, adds her artistic touches to a T-shirt that will hang in the library. **3.** Jason Kudron took his 2-year-old son Jackson for a 5K race ride. **4.** Runners brace for a chilly start to the Second Annual Lace Up for the Library 5K Run/Walk. **5.** Sarah Girach, 8, the winner of the Kids Fun Run, shows off her medal. **6.** Ethan Arcata of Rocky Hill reached the finish line second with his time of 18:26.9. **7.** Elise Kennedy, 11, of Middletown was the first female across the finish line with a time of 20:52.5. **8.** Race Director Mena Shehata had a big helping hand making sure the races ran smoothly from library staff and volunteers including Sharon Reiner, Jennifer Amo and Director Mary Hogan. **9.** Andrew Lin holds his 2-year-old daughter Ivy as they wait for the Kids Run to begin. **10.** The Kids Fun Run racers warm up prior to the start of their race. **11.** Beth Mead, Mary Jean Kirtland and Donna Bostwick wait in the warmth of the Griswold Middle School gymnasium for the race to start. This was the first 5K race the friends ran. **12.** Abigail Steadman, 7, welcomes her mother Kari after both completed the 5K. **13.** Jen Zappulla of the Cora J. Belden Library watches as Capt. John Arcari of the Rocky Hill Fire-Police signs a T-shirt that will be displayed in the library. **14.** Kelli Kozaryn and Dina Okada drink up their morning coffees to help them get off to a running start.



"I just love riding on my bike. It's one of my favorite things to do."

– Paul D'Attilio

Promoting the outdoors

Bicycling and walking advocates inject new energy into local and regional efforts

by Mark Jahne
Editor

When members of the West Hartford Pedestrian & Bicycle Commission scheduled a regional meeting to combine the efforts, dreams and accomplishments of fellow advocates from Greater Hartford, they didn't know what to expect. Perhaps a few folks from another town or two would attend out of curiosity.

What they got was an overflow crowd of passionate bicycle riders and walkers who all want to see more done to promote trails

and safe streets. People from 15 towns showed up and they formed a new organization called Ride CT.

Wethersfield and Rocky Hill residents were among those in attendance at the March 22 meeting. They made new friends and went home with new ideas and the realization that there is strength in numbers.

They also learned what has already been accomplished in individual communities so that – pardon the pun – they don't have to recreate the wheel.

Kevin Sullivan of Wethersfield was so

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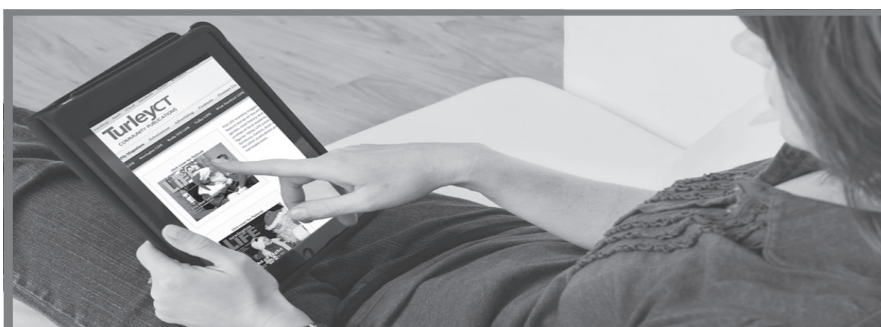
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enthused that he rode his bike from Wethersfield to West Hartford in evening temperatures that were in the 30s. He shares a cycling passion with fellow residents Rob O'Connor and Thomas Brown.

Sullivan, 58, works for the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and commutes to work in Hartford on two wheels whenever possible. He started riding as a child.

"I got serious with commuting in 1990," he said. "We're all Complete Streets advocates."

Smart Growth America describes Complete Streets as roads that are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops and bicycle to work.

O'Connor, who is 56, has also been at least a casual rider for his entire life. He helped form a bicycle advocacy group in South

Windsor before moving to Old Wethersfield a few years ago and was instrumental in getting a fourth grade bicycle curriculum into that town's schools.

He is part of Bike Walk Connecticut and also commutes by bicycle to a job in Hartford. It's a shorter and much easier trip now than it was when he lived in South Windsor, but he did it from there as well.

"This is a bike-friendly community without the official designation," he said of Wethersfield. "It's a great place to ride, it's a great place to walk."

He had particular praise for the Folly Brook Trail. O'Connor agreed with Sullivan that one of their primary goals is more roads that meet the Complete Streets criteria.

Another goal is more places where people can safely park a bicycle because that could help make the town a destination for cyclists from all over the region.

O'Connor is a proponent of bicycle safety training for auto



Photos by Lisa Brisson

Paul D'Attilio, left, loves to ride his bicycle. Ed Chiucarello is an avid walker and hiker. Both live in Rocky Hill.

Thank you to the volunteers who helped improve lives for children and families in our community last year.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) in Enfield, 2016 Year of Caring at South Windsor Child Development Center, Stuff the Bus school supply drive in Hartford, United Way Reader Recognition at Alfred E. Burr School Elementary School in Hartford

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and truck drivers as more people on two wheels share the road with people who have four wheels or more.

"It's not cars versus bikes. We would just like you to see us," Brown said.

Brown added that riding on two wheels allows him to explore the region. He is the faculty adviser to the Wethersfield High School Bicycle Club, formed four years ago.

The club initiated a swap meet that has evolved into a full bicycle festival. This year's event is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. June 11 outside Hanmer School and the adjoining Stillman building.

"We just want to support all the biking and pedestrian activities in town," he said. "I moved here in 2001. At the time, I was a big runner and ran every street in the town."

Brown also volunteers his time and knowledge at Biciro, a community bicycle store and cooperative in Hartford. He looks forward to the completion of the bike and walking path on the Glastonbury side of the Putnam Bridge.

He once rode his bicycle from Wethersfield to New Hampshire.

"My wish is I'd like to see a couple of self-serve bike repair stations," Brown said. "We also want to see the culture of the town be safe."

He has a podcast called Bike



Ed Chiucarello and Paul D'Attilio created this map to show potential bike lanes as well as those streets that are unsafe because of heavy traffic.

Karma that presents positive stories, interviews and skits about living with all kinds of bicycles and people. One of the most recent entries talked about how much he enjoys smelling the aroma of food wafting through the air as he pedals past homes where people are cooking or baking.

"We want to be a ready group to knit things together at the right time when funding becomes available," Sullivan said. "Hartford has a very

rich bicycle history. I'm also involved with a group called Cycling Without Age."

That organization started in Denmark and uses special bicycles that resemble rickshaws in which one person pedals and two older people ride along, he explained.

The Rocky Hill tandem of Ed Chiucarello and Paul D'Attilio have separate passions. The former loves to walk and hike and the latter is a

cyclist. But they share a passion for making their town a better place for both activities.

"Moving forward, this is the way to set up your community," D'Attilio said.

"I'm the walker. I started Walk Bike Rocky Hill five months ago," Chiucarello said. "The meadows is a great place to walk."

That group already has 66 members as well as a Facebook page. He is one of the volunteer trail managers who assist the town Parks and Recreation Department and keep an eye on the trails and public parks.

The two men met through Walk Bike Rocky Hill.

The group meets at 7:30 p.m. the first Monday of every month.

"I'm an alternate on the committee for the Plan of Conservation and Development. There are a number of things related to bicycling," Chiucarello said. "The goal is to make Rocky Hill more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. One of the goals is to connect to the river."

"I've been riding my whole life. I used to ride my bike year round," D'Attilio said. "I try to ride off the main roads. I just love riding on my bike. It's one of my favorite things to do."

That's in part because he considers the heavy traffic on Cromwell



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Avenue and the Silas Deane Highway a safety hazard.

He logged 3,000 miles around town this past year.

"I ride solo. A lot of people ride in groups because they feel safer that way," he added.

He has also taken bicycle trips to various places. The two men would like to see the town do some kind of formal assessment of the potential for additional bicycle lanes on local streets.

"The hard work for us is how do we move this forward?" D'Attilio said.

Realtor Julie Lemos of Century 21 Clemens & Sons Realty said towns that are bicycle and pedestrian friendly can add to the value of one's home. She lives in Wethersfield and her office is in Rocky Hill.

"It's something that buyers are looking for," she said. "It's definitely a draw. A lot of them look at Wethersfield, particularly Old Wethersfield."

That's particularly true with millennials, the largest demographic of home buyers. They decide ahead

of time the amenities they want in a community and compare towns to see where those amenities are most prominent.

"It also shows that it's a more progressive community," Lemos said.

She spoke about how popular West Hartford is because of its shops, restaurants and designation as a bicycle-friendly town. She firmly believes that if Rocky Hill and Wethersfield can earn the same designation they would become an even greater attraction for home buyers.

She added that this is also important with clients who are relocating to Greater Hartford from other metropolitan areas.

One client selected a Wethersfield home over houses in two other towns because of the bicycling opportunities it offers.

Ann Hartman, assistant director of the Central Connecticut Health District, enjoys riding a bicycle. She's a proponent of walking and cycling as part of good health. The district serves Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield.

"This is high on our priority list," she said.

Hartman said the district is already in discussions with town planners to adopt the Complete Streets program.

CCHD wants to see as many streets as possible become safe and friendly places where people can walk and ride. Those who need a bicycle helmet can purchase one from the district for \$10.

"Wethersfield has a bike to school day coming up," Hartman said.

She pointed out that bicycle riding is good for people who have joint problems, especially knees, because it creates less stress on those joints than other forms of exercise, such as jogging and running.

"It's a family friendly activity. It's a good way for families to interact," she said. "It is purported to raise the property values and it brings some economic vitality to town."

Some people commute to work on bikes. She said that is not only a healthy alternative but it also saves money on gas. Another benefit is

that physical activity has been shown to improve brain function.

"There are a plethora of studies that show exercise reduces stress," she added.

Rocky Hill and Wethersfield already have organized biking and walking groups. The Capitol Region Council of Governments has mapped out existing and proposed bicycle/pedestrian paths. Hartman said the health district is a big fan of low-cost ways in which people can become more active.

She sees a direct link between this new advocacy and the CCHD's annual Step Into Summer four-town walking competition. It begins April 30 and continues until June 10. The event was lengthened by two weeks and dates were changed to spring-time this year to allow more children to become involved.

People who live or work in its four towns are welcome to participate in this friendly competition. Berlin is the reigning town champion.

Register at walkingworks.com or contact Hartman at 860-721-2824. **RHL**

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Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

1 SCORE Small Business Counseling, 12:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

Pokemon League, 4 p.m., for grades 4-8, Cora J. Belden Library, also May 15 and 22

Family Sensory Story Time, 6:15 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 8 and 15

2 Fun for Ones, 10:15 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 9

Knitting Group, 11 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 9, 16, 23 and 30

Google Computer Science Workshop, 4 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 9, 16 and 23

CT Hearing Voices Network support group, 7 p.m., Rocky Hill Congregational Church, 805-817 Old Main St., second floor classroom, 203-391-4968, also May 9, 16, 23 and 30

3 Playgroup Plus, 10:15 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 10, 17, 24 and 31

On Our Own Preschool Storytime, 1 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 10

-Ology, 4 p.m., for grades 3-6, Cora J. Belden Library, also May 10

Coloring for Adults, 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 10, 17, 24 and 31

4 La Leche League, 10 a.m. to noon, 23 Textbook Ave., 860-529-2307 or mgubala@sbcglobal.net

ESL Classes, 10:30 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 11, 18 and 25

Minecraft Club, 4 p.m., for grades 2-5, Cora J. Belden Library, also May 11, 18 and 25

Minecraft Club, 5:30 p.m., for grades 6-12, Cora J. Belden Library, also May 11, 18 and 25

5 Art Start, 10:30 a.m., for ages 2 and older, Cora J. Belden Library

6 Playgroup, 10:15 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 13 and 20

8 Cr-afternoon, 4:15 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

9 Coyote Talk, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

10 Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group, 5 p.m., The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., registration required, 860-563-5588 or kpernerewski@benchmarkquality.com

Friends of the Library Board, 7 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

11 Family Make It, Take It, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also May 18

12 Healthy Me, 10:15 a.m., for ages 2 and older with an adult, registration required, Cora J. Belden Library

13 Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group, 10 a.m., registration required, The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., 860-563-5588 or kpernerewski@benchmarkquality.com

16 Health & Wellness with Dr. Klughers, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

19 LEGO Free Play,

10:30 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library

23 Birds of Prey, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

24 Public Hearing for the comprehensive update of the Rocky Hill Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map, 6:30 p.m., Council Chambers, Town Hall, 761 Old Main St.

25 Rocky Hill Historical Society Annual Meeting, 6 p.m., Rocky Hill United Methodist Church, 623 Old Main St., \$6 donation, 860-563-6704 or info@rhhistory.org

31 Preschool Music & Play, 6:15 p.m., for ages birth to 5 with an adult, Cora J. Belden Library

Is your club, community organization, school or house of worship holding an event open to the general public? If so, please send us the details for inclusion in our calendar. Email your events to Mark Jahne at mjahne@turleyct.com or mail them to Turley CT Community Publications, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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Editorial

Get outside and smell the fresh air

Winter is finally over, not that we had all that bad a season. There were a couple of significant snow storms but, for the most part, the flakes held off and the temperatures didn't plunge all that often.

Then came a rain-soaked April. But as the old folk tale goes, "April showers bring May flowers." We are already starting to see the beauty of nature coming back to life.

No matter how long one has lived in this area, it is still a delight to see the annual renewal that occurs at this time each year. The sun seems brighter, attitudes seem better, everyone seems to have a little more spring in their step.

Speaking of steps, how about getting out of the house or office and taking a bunch of those? Some towns are sponsoring walking contests. But whether there's an organized effort or not, why not take advantage of the good weather by getting a little exercise?

We're not just talking about children and young adults who all too often seem consumed with smart phones and video games. There are plenty of people of all ages who are addicted to their phones, or watch television multiple hours a day, or who just show a lack of motivation to do much of anything.

The human body is designed to move. It is not designed to sit for long periods every day,

although school and jobs sometimes leave us no choice. But we can still try.

Exercise is good for our circulatory system and our hearts. It can help control or even bring down high blood pressure. It can help us digest food. It can help us sleep.

Science has discovered that exercise produces endorphins that positively affect our cognitive functions and our attitudes and feelings. Think about it – have you ever seen someone jumping up and down yelling "Wow, am I depressed?" Probably not.

In a world where people seem to be losing personal touch with one another, let's strap on some comfortable shoes or sneakers and take a walk. Greet the people you pass on the sidewalk. Wave to folks in their yards. Maybe even make a new friend or two.

If you don't want to walk, ride a bicycle. That's a great way not only to get some exercise but to travel from place to place in a manner that more closely connects you to your surroundings.

Some folks bike to and from work. That may not be for everyone but it's the ultimate "green" idea. With all of the pills and oils and special programs promising to give us incredible health if we are only willing to part with our money, the tried and true approach is as solid as it ever was.

Watch what you eat and get regular exercise. It's that simple. Here's to celebrating the season by getting out of the house and moving around.

Letters

Lights may be health hazard

To the Editor:

I am part of a large group of residents who are extremely concerned about, and strongly oppose, replacing existing street lights with LEDs or fluorescent lights. There are many scientists who have done numerous studies on and written about the serious detrimental effects of all types of LED and fluorescent lights on human health.

More and more ophthalmologists and retinal specialists are warning their patients about the dangers from these lights on the eyes. The problem is their high proportion of short-wave blue light that is highly damaging to the retina, which studies have proven eventually leads to macular degeneration.

There is also a very low proportion of red and near infrared light that activates cytochrome oxidase, a central enzyme of the mitochondrial function, which promotes healing and can repair tissue damage in a cellular level.

If our street lights are replaced with these detrimental types of lighting, residents will be exposed to them when they are out at night where dangerous glare and visual contrast reduction affects vision acuity when driving. Because they are so oppressively bright with their inherent short-wave blue light, they will bypass any window treatment, even the most room-darkening shades, creating sleep problems.

Nowadays many are focused on energy savings and costs.

Unfortunately, many people don't realize the serious health implications when making choices, such as voting to install these new lights. We would like to know that our elected officials will do their homework before making these kinds of decisions and not take chances with the health of citizens.

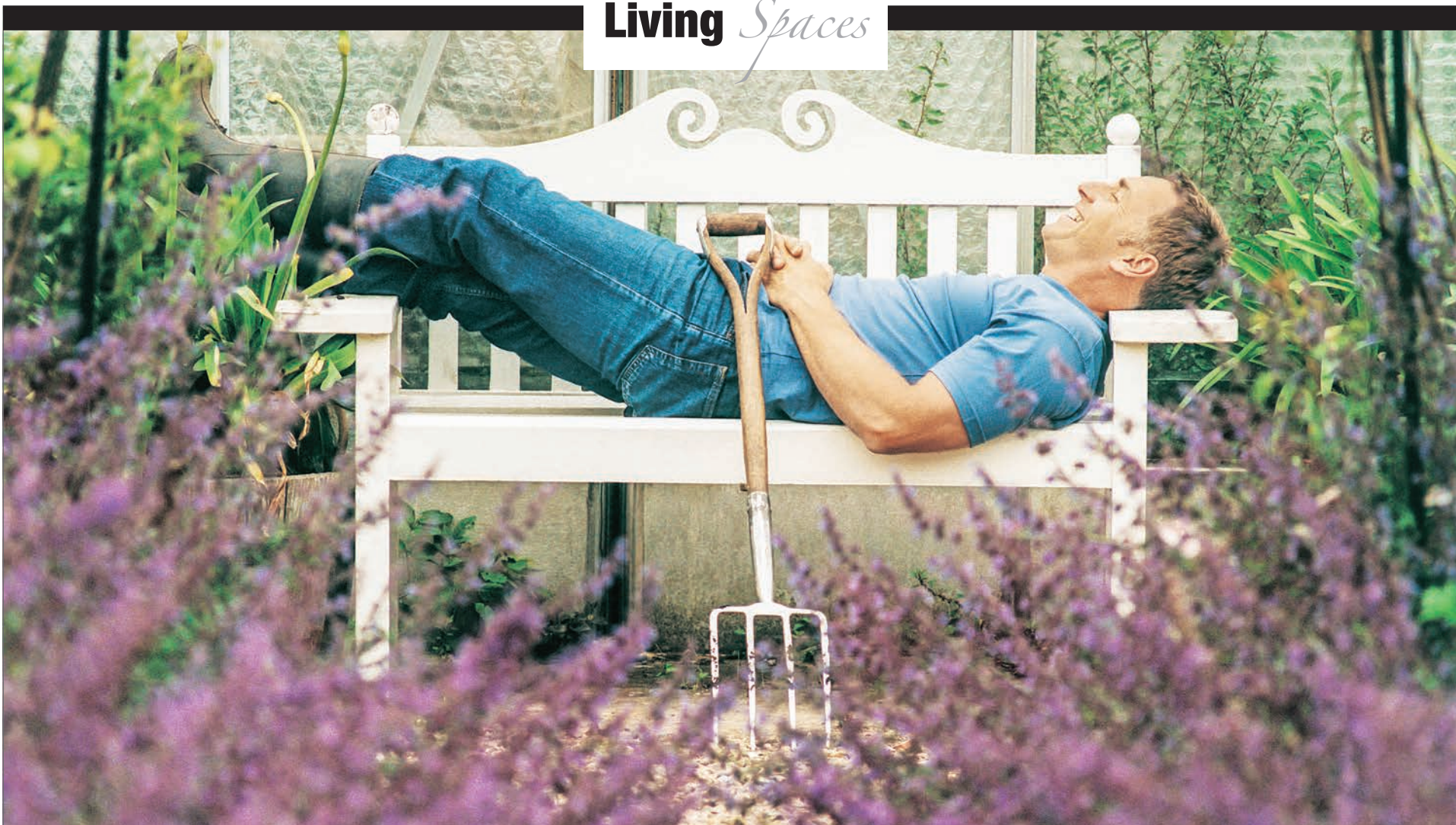
There are alternatives, such as incandescent or even halogen, which is an analog thermal light source and not digital. These are very conservative cost-wise and energy-wise. Please put more importance on the health of the residents of Rocky Hill instead of any potential financial gains.

– *Antonia Palazzolo*



Living spaces Home and Garden

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Men who garden

Women aren't the only ones growing flowers

by Lynn Woike
Editor

While most garden clubs are comprised totally of women, some organizations formed around individual plant varieties have many men.

Steve Kovack was an honorary member of the West Hartford

Garden Club until becoming a full member about four years ago.

He is its only male member.

The Farmington Garden Club has none. Hill and Dale Garden Club in Glastonbury and the Avon Garden Club also have no male members.

"It's not that we don't want them, we just can't get them,"

The dog days of summer are almost here...



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said Jan Brigham.

Kovack said he grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania, with 200 chickens, three cows, some beef cattle and pigs – and an acre of garden that he began running when he was about 12. When he moved to West Hartford, he planted shade gardens around the house along with taking a community garden plot.

“I grow everything,” he said.

The reason he became involved with the club is because he was taking the master gardener course that required him to do a volunteer project. The West Hartford Garden Club was taking care of the Butler-McCook House and Garden in Hartford and asked him to develop a shade garden. It required him to clear away debris and rip out a lot of ivy, including poison ivy and otherwise “sawing through this forest.”

“The West Hartford Garden Club ladies fell in love with me,” Kovack said, adding that he could be the only man in the club because he thinks “a lot of men get intimidated.”

“In the spring I came back. Thousands and thousands of bulbs were in blossom. They had been dormant and so they started coming up. That blew my mind. I was part of this creation.”

Kovack went on to help plant

hostas and built a path through the woods.

“I tried to get other men to join, but they just didn’t. They just don’t want to be part of it for some reason. ... The men that I know don’t do much gardening and they’re all very independent.”

He thought perhaps it had to do with the socializing that goes on among women and men not wanting to be part of groups, yet he talked about the friendships that he has formed with a diverse group of men he’s gardened with in the community plot for years.

“The garden club is so excited about the community garden, they want to put us on their tour” for 2018, Kovack said.

Although The Gardeners of America/Men’s Garden Clubs of America lists no clubs in Connecticut, there is one just for men: the Men’s Garden Club of Wethersfield. It formed in 1956.

The November Richard Prentice moved into his new home, the gardens were dormant.

“In the spring I was overwhelmed with new growth and didn’t know what to do about it,” he said.

He attended the plant sale held by the club in May and became a

member after that. Now he is the treasurer.

“Sometimes when I mention that I’m in a men’s garden club I’m asked if I’m gay. ... Maybe that’s why few men join. I’ve been to women’s club meetings. They are much more organized. That’s a problem,” he said.

The club belonged to the National Garden Clubs, but was ejected because of its men only membership. While the club hasn’t exactly forbade women to join, it hasn’t recruited women and one that was once sponsored by a member several years ago “got nowhere.”

According to its Facebook page,

the club devotes “its energies to the promotion of the full appreciation of gardening, landscaping and horticultural activities,” promoting “higher garden standards in the community for the benefit of individuals” and instilling “the love of growing plants in the hearts of children, particularly among those for whom opportunities are restricted.”

The club also promotes friendships, civic activities and a general interest in individual, private and community gardens, planting and parks.

Its most significant community project is the care and maintenance



“We do enjoy solving problems when they arise. ... We try to help each other.”

–Fred Odell

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of the Frank W. Weston Rose Garden, located adjacent to the town hall and library. Members meet Saturday mornings during the growing season to care for the beds. Its annual plant sale the day before Mother's Day draws crowds, both for the hanging baskets and vegetable plants, and also for the "home-grown," a large variety of perennials that have been split from members' gardens.

That's what hooked Fred Odell when he was 35 ... 38 years ago.

He'd done planting at his prior home, so when he saw a sign for the plant sale, he stopped.

"Man," he remembered thinking, "these were the friendliest guys I've ever met."

He ended up going home and getting some plants he'd been growing, bringing them back to the sale. That got him invited to the post-plant sale meeting.

"Within a year, I'm running the plant sale. Then I got to be president," Odell said.

He also became a master gardener.

At 72, he said he's one of the youngest members. Most are retired and older. While most are from Wethersfield, members also come from Glastonbury, Rocky Hill, Cromwell and South Windsor.

"We do enjoy solving problems when they arise. ... We try to help each other," he said, noting that seems to be what was behind the formation of the original group of men – some who were farmers and others in a variety of agricultural occupations.

"They had a group of guys who'd just chat. They were friends. It was very informal. ... They would meet at each other's houses once a month or so."

As more men joined, the club formed. Officers were elected, committees were formed and speakers were featured. Social events got added to the schedule.

Now, rather than corn and tobacco, conversations are more

likely to be about shrubs and lawns, said Odell, who estimated that a third of the club lives in condominiums, "and their gardening is far reduced from what it was, and they're not into homegrown so much anymore."

When the club formed, he said, "There were four or five other gardening clubs and presently there are three women's gardening clubs in town. ... Twice in my 30 years, females have inquired about becoming members, but it's an issue that kind of dies on the vine. It's not something that's on the top of our list. ... None of our wives want any part of us. They do their own thing."

"I'm in many other organizations, and women tend to be detail oriented, very thorough. Men are scattered."

While he said he's "never attempted to join any other garden club," for a while he was a member of the New England Hosta Society and, together with his wife, who he said is "much more of a gardener," he began

a garden club at the lake where they have a summer home.

Tom Mierzejewski and his wife, Jenne McDermott, love gardening and maintain a parklike setting around their home, but their real passion is orchids, which they use to decorate their home's interior.

He supported his wife in founding the Nutmeg State Orchid Society in 2008 – she as the president and he as the treasurer. Of its 200 members, nearly half are men – some who have joined with their wives and some who come alone.

While the median age is about 50, it's a diverse group in both expertise and in age, including a teenage boy.

Hearing most garden clubs have no male members, Mierzejewski was surprised and wondered how clubs went about recruiting members.

The Nutmeg State Orchid Society prides itself on making everyone feel welcome, he said, with name tags, emails and a welcome package. **RHL**



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Green tips for black thumb gardeners

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

As springtime rolls in and yards turn from muddy brown to fresh green, it can be challenging for those who have a self-described “black thumb” in the garden.

With a few simple tips, however, those with gardening difficulties can start to get their plants in shape.

Before giving up completely on being able to garden, there are a few questions that should be asked.

“What exactly are you trying to grow? Are you basing it on one experience, or have you repetitively tried different plants in different areas?” said Don Woods, owner of Stonehedge Landscaping and Garden Center in Newington.

“There’s usually a reason.”

Woods suggested that for some people it might be necessary to have their soil tested to make



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sure that it is hospitable for growing. Adding topsoil or compost could help to improve growing conditions.

"I would definitely recommend that they start from the ground up," Peggy Bosco, co-owner of Bosco's Garden Center and Landscaping in Simsbury, advised.

"You want to enrich your soil because that's where your plants get all their nutrients from."

For those who need to improve their soil, Bosco recommended using an organic topsoil as opposed to a synthetic one.

"Every time you dig a hole to put something in the ground, that plant is going to be there for years," she said. "Organic soil would build that base organically as opposed to keeping a synthetic product there."

Another large piece of advice from planting professionals stems from a common problem they have seen with clients.

"Number one, don't overwater," Bruce McCue, owner of McCue Gardens in Wethersfield, said.

While many plants simply require water, soil and sunlight, too much water can be irreversibly damaging.

"The worst thing is overwatering a plant, actually, because once you rot the root system, you can't bring it back," Bosco said. "Overwatering tends to be worse than underwatering."

There are clues to look for that show a plant is being overwatered, including wilting when the soil is wet, brown leaves and rotting roots. According to Bosco, watching plants to see what they need is a crucial piece of gardening.

"The leaves and the plants will show you when they need water. They're talking to you, you just have to know how to listen," she said. "Everybody that works here is educated in that field. They would tell you how a plant shows you that it's thirsty."

Each of the garden professionals also stressed the importance of knowing what you are planting and where.

"Read the tags as to whether it goes in the sun or shade," McCue said.

"A lot of people will put a plant for shade in the sun and a plant for sun in the shade, and that's not a good environment for them to grow."

Bosco agreed looking at a garden or yard's specific conditions is integral to the success or failure of a plant.

"Plant the plant in the right conditions," she said. "You have to have the right plant not only for our environment here in the Northeast, but also for the conditions that you're offering."

The experts said that people should remain realistic about what they can plant, and the professionals at each of their garden centers can help guide visitors toward making the right choices.

"There definitely are plants that are easier to grow than others," Bosco said. "Native plants are typically easier. Once you start getting into specialties and perennials, those would usually need special fertilizers."

"If you're specifically looking at gardens, tomatoes are easy. If you're doing perennials, hostas are easy."

Most trees and shrubs are relatively easy to grow," Woods said. "It's really about proper depth and proper after-care."

Most importantly, all three of the plant experts encourage those who believe they have a "black thumb" to ask questions at their local gardening center.

"We have people here who can help with any of those questions," Woods said. "People can always come by and get help." **RHL**

Stonehedge Landscaping and Garden Center is located at 1616 Willard Ave., Newington. They can be reached at 860-667-1158 or online at www.stonehedgegardeningco.com.

Bosco's Garden Center and Landscaping is located at 1376 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury. They can be reached at 860-658-2428 or online at www.boscogardencenter.com.

McCue Gardens is located at 47 Hartford Ave., Wethersfield. They can be reached at 860-529-5967 or online at www.mccuegardens.com.

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The benefits of backyard

koi ponds

Koi ponds can make for beautiful additions to landscaped backyards or home gardens. While many people are drawn to koi ponds because of their aesthetic appeal, there are many additional reasons for homeowners to consider installing koi ponds in their



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backyards.

Ponds and water gardens can transform yards rather quickly. Ponds can add appeal to otherwise mundane yards and provide eye-catching, relaxing spots to sit and enjoy the scenery.

Koi ponds have recently fallen into a favor with homeowners in North America, but these popular water features date back several centuries to Asia.

Centuries ago, Chinese rice farmers began keeping carp in their rice paddies, and that practice eventually caught on in Japan. The fish started to breed and form slight

color variations. Koi, often referred to as "Nishikigoi," are actually descendants of the common carp, though the koi of today are more brightly hued and ornamental fish than carp.

Koi can become a low-maintenance family pet. These fish tend to grow accustomed to having people around, and will often interact with visitors at the surface of the water. It's not unusual to have koi beg for food or take food from a person's hand. They also may tolerate some light handling.

Another benefit of koi ponds is that they create a miniature ecosys-

tem within the yard.

When stocked with aquatic plants and other fish that can help keep mosquito larvae and other parasites at bay, they can sustain themselves quite nicely.

Ponds also can attract birds and beneficial insects, such as butterflies and dragonflies. By implementing straight vertical walls on the perimeter of the pond and setting up some natural barriers, homeowners can avoid unwanted predators from disturbing their koi ponds.

Koi ponds also provide some psychological benefits. The sound of

the water can be soothing and relaxing. Sitting by the pond may help alleviate stress, as unwinding next to a pond and watching the fish swim by can help individuals decompress.

Homeowners who have koi ponds may also benefit socially from these eye-catching additions to their landscapes. Homeowners may connect with others who share their passion for koi and water features. This opens up the opportunity to share the landscape and pond with others, building new friends and relationships in the process.

RHL



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Conrad

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Photos by Alicia Wright

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]



Moon Nicknames

This month, the full moon – or the full “Flower” moon – falls on the 10th. Appropriately named as spring warmth triggers the blossoming of flowers. Native Americans started naming moons to help track the seasons. There was a lot of variability, between regions and tribes – at times leading to the same moon

having more than one name. Over time, the naming was streamlined and applied to the Gregorian calendar.

In January, there is the Wolf Moon as during the month wolves would howl out of hunger. Next, there is the Snow Moon in February, due to the snowy nature of the month. March has the Worm Moon, as the softening ground

allows earthworms to emerge.

In April, there is the Pink Moon, not due to the color of the moon but of the ground phlox flower that becomes widespread during spring. June features the Strawberry Moon, as this is the time when harvesting of the fruit typically happens. In July, with bucks growing new antlers, it's the Buck Moon. August has the Sturgeon Moon, as it is the time to

best catch this fish. In September there is the Harvest Moon. With colder months ahead, the Hunter's Moon signals the time to hunt in October. The 11th month of the year has the Beaver Moon, corresponding to the time to set traps. Finally, in December there is the Cold Moon – aptly named for the longer nights and colder temperatures. [RHL](#)

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